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ABSTRACT

Native Americans are attending college in increasing numbers. In 1986, 14,499 native American women were full-time students in four year schools; altogether 51,000 were enrolled in colleges and universities. Typically, native American women are raising families, working as primary wage earners for their families, actively engaged in community life, and attending college classes. This paper gives a brief history of Indian women in higher education and examines their changing roles in the community. Traditionally, education for native Americans has been driven by colonial impulses and influenced by male-dominated European models. For many years, Indian women were trained as domestics. Their difficult lives required commitments that made education impossible. Only in the last 20 years have American Indian women been able to enter schools with any confidence that improved working and living opportunities would result. Teachers, counselors, and administrators need to be aware of the particular needs of their students who are native American women. Cooperative networking between two- and four-year institutions and consistent and accessible support systems are suggested to help these women realize the advantages of higher education. Contains 15 references. (DHP)

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American Indian Women

In Higher Education

Sue Hayes, April 1989

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AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Susanna Hayes has worked with Native American Tribes of Washington state since 1964. She came West after graduation from Loyola University of Chicago to work as a volunteer resident teacher at St. Mary's Mission in Omak. St. Mary's had been operated as a boarding school since the late 1800's. It exists now as Paschal Sherman Indian School and is tribally controlled.

Between 1964-68, she observed the complex dynamics of cross-cultural education and the social dynamics which existed between the Tribal people and non-tribal residents of the area. There were many puzzling issues which seemed unexplainable. One major concern was the under-education of the Tribal population. There were also severe social problems including high incidence of alcohol abuse beginning at early ages.

From 1968 to 73, she enrolled in graduate studies at the Universities of Arizona and Michigan. The main focus of these studies was counseling and education of Native Americans. Her dissertation is entitled: The Resistance to Education for Assimilation by the Colville Indians, 1872 to 1972.

In 1973, she returned to the Colville Reservation and worked as a counselor and adult educator. In 1977, she came to Western Washington University to establish and direct the Center for Indian Education. She continues to work with the tribal educators of the area along with the training that is done through Western's Social Services and Research Demonstration Program.

INTRODUCTION

In August of 1974, I met and worked with an extraordinarily motivated and effective advocate for the education of Native Americans. She is Lorraine Misiaszek of the Colville Confederated Tribes. She was born and raised on the Reservation in the community of Inchelium in Northeastern Washington. Her life focused on the well being of her family and the families of her community. Active and concerned, she was recognized by others as a leader.

Her career in public service began with her election to the Tribal Council. This experience of complex organizational and political policy making, public relations, negotiation, and need discernment clarified the value of formal education for Lorraine. As an adult student, she entered in Gonzaga University and received a bachelor's degree in history and a master's degree in educational administration. Her initial degree was a way to gain insight into the struggles of other groups for continued existence in the face of adversity. Her own people were being threatened by such divisive federal Indian policies as termination and relocation (Tyler, 1964, page 139). Her second degree prepared her to do the work she focused on for the rest of her life. Educational planning and development was crucial to the well being of her tribal members for the present and future.

Managing a busy family and community life, a career, and schooling is the norm for Native women who are motivated to higher education (Bellanger and Reese, 1983). In many cases the Native women in college and university classes are Grandmothers. They have lived for their families and communities as did their Grandmothers. However, they realize that formal education is not a luxury for a few. Rather it is a means of gaining access to the systems of governance, human services, health, and education that impact the

daily lives of their people and control their future options.

Native people have experienced the difficulties of trying to live without adequate education. As recently as 1953, the national director of Indian Education reported that only 15% of school aged children were attending school (French, 1987). The condition of widespread under-education has been of great consequence to the Native communities. The following excerpt from a letter written by a Colville high school student in 1971, demonstrates her strong feeling reactions and negative experiences at a local public school.

> "Report card time next week. Bummer! I think I passed my two subjects. I only have two classes. English and U.S. History. The rest of the time I have study halls. I got kicked out of Nurses Aide. This next semester I'm supposed to get more classes so I can get my credits and get out of this dump. I got suspended at the beginning of December but made it back two days latter, bummer. The principal got into a big hassle with us. He got mad told us to get out and don't come back until he talks with our parents. Bad scene! Big Deal! Then before that I got called in by Juvenile Office for truancy. My sister and I. We didn't get excused the two weeks we missed for apple harvest and they got uptight. I'm in heap big trouble now days. Must be my long hair!
>
> "I was thinking about going to another school. I doubt if I will.
>
> "Saw a lot of the old class over the holidays. They came home from boarding schools. The girls have really changed. All they seem to wanna do is booze it up all vacation. That's just not my thing yet. I guess cuz it doesn't turn me on. A lot of the girls are getting married and having babies. Not for me.
>
> "We had a meeting with these two guys who wanted to know if we had any plans on going to college. Just a few did. I know I'm not going. I can't wait to get out of school. It's a big hassle. Sooner I'm out the better." (Personal correspondence with the author, 1971.)

For this student, there were no outreach programs from college campuses near her home community. The closest college was over 100 miles away. As a young woman, she did not value formal schooling for many reasons. However, in 1989, she can attend college classes offered at a center within walking distance of her home.

The following paper will examine some of the aspects of how and why Native women are succeeding in their goals of education for themselves, their children, and grandchildren. Through this information, educators in colleges and universities may gain an awareness of what is necessary to support and encourage their students. They will see that cultural differences between Native Americans and other groups include a need to maintain a firm identity and affiliation with their own communities in both the process and goals of their education. Native tribes have been exposed to the efforts of colonizers who were intent on destroying their cultures from the beginning of contacts with European explorers. Schooling played a crucial role in that effort. Therefore, schooling has a negative connotation for many tribal members.

CURRENT STATUS OF NATIVE WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The U.S. Department of Education collects and reports on the enrollments of students in 3,200 institutions of higher education. The July 6, 1988 Chronicle of Higher Education published the following data.

Native Americans in Colleges and Universities

1978	1980	1982	1984	1986
78,000	84,000	88,000	84,000	90,000

While there needs to be allowances for errors in the reporting systems of some institutions, it is clear that enrollments of Native Americans tend to increase over the years. It is important to note that for 1986, 11,000 Native Americans were enrolled at private institutions. This represents approximately 12% of the college population. Many of these

students were attending tribally controlled community colleges. For example at the College of Ganado and the Navajo Community College in Arizona, 92.3% and 87.3%, respectively, of the students were Native Americans (Chronicle of Higher Education, 7/6/88 page 29).

Over 50% of all students in higher education for 1982 were women (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1983). The total number of women was 5.4 million. There were 5.3 million men for the same year. By comparison, in 1986, a peak year for Native American college enrollments, there were 51,000 Native women in college (Chronicle of Higher Education, 7/6/88, page 20). Being a clear minority in terms of numbers and a distinct minority in terms of educational and personal needs, it becomes evident how Native American women can be overlooked by the dominant population in college and university settings, especially the larger institutions.

However, in 1980 8% of the Native American population 25 years or older were college graduates. For the White population, the percentage for the same age group was 17% (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 1987, page 2). Between 1976 and 1982, the Indian enrollment in higher education increased by more than 15%. Therefore, despite the difficulties associated with being members of a cultural minority population, Native Americans are enrolling in colleges at increasing levels and are increasingly receiving college degrees. It is important to keep in mind that Native people were not granted citizenship until 1924. They were not allowed to attend public schools until the Johnson O'Malley Act of 1934 (Tyler, 1964). This act gave school districts federal funds to compensate for the lack of property taxes paid by Native people who lived on land held in federal trusts.

Of the 51,000 Native women enrolled in 1986, 14,499 were full-time students in four-year institutions and 7,258 were part-time. (Chronicle of Higher Education, 7/6/1988, page

20.) Women enrolled in two-year institutions were 10,273 full-time and 18,559 part-time. Clearly, the largest number of women were attending two-year institutions on a part-time basis. This reflects the life circumstances of the women. They are typically raising families, working as primary wage earners for their families, actively engaged in community life, and attending college classes (Bellanger and Reese, 1983, pp. 10-11).

In Washington State for 1986, there was a total of 3,542 Native Americans enrolled in higher education institutions. This is compared with a total college enrollment of 242,443 for the state. The institutions enrolling the largest numbers of Native Americans were:

Heritage College	17.3%
Whatcom Community College	11.8%
Grays Harbor Community College	3.3%
Everett Community College	3.1%

Western Washington University enrolled 0.7% Native Americans

(Chronicle of Higher Education, 7/6/88, page 29A).

Clearly, the Native students are choosing colleges close to their home communities with class offerings that can be worked into their demanding schedules.

All of the colleges cited are close to concentrations of Native American students. Heritage College, located on the Yakima Reservation and strongly supported by that Tribe, serves the greatest number of Native students. Programs at this college are designed with Indian students as the central focus. Correspondence courses, work-study courses, evening and week-end classes, all make credit completion possible (Interview with Dean Anis Quidwai, 1988). The college also operates satellite campuses in remote communities that

are close to concentrations of Native people. For example, a branch of Heritage is based in Omak to serve members of the Colville Tribe. Such programs are few given the relatively small number of Native students served and the costly nature of providing higher education in remote areas.

HISTORICAL RECORD OF INDIANS IN HIGHER EDUCATION.

The Indian Education Center at Arizona State University was founded in 1954 and was the first in the country (Center for Education Statistics, 1987, page 5). The first college preparatory program for Indians was established at Haskell Institute in Kansas in 1963. In 1965, the school became known as Haskell Indian Junior College, one of the first in the country. If we consider that as recently as 1961, only 66 Indian students graduated from four-year colleges, the growth of Native students' participation in higher education is remarkable. By 1980, 8% of Indians 25 years old or older were college graduates. The majority of these were women (Center for Education Statistics, 1987).

Critical to the improved enrollment and graduation rates for Native American students is the fact that over 50% of them are able to enroll in two-year colleges for their initial higher education experience (Astin, 1982). Two year colleges are also well attended by other minorities (Wilson and Melendez, 1987). Opportunities for educational remediation, career and personal counseling services, and closer relationships between students and teachers are three reasons for the preference for two-year colleges. Considering that nearly 48% of the Native Americans are living in rural areas, much of that being trust lands, it is easy to see that two year colleges are more accessible than four-year schools.

Economic concerns are also part of the rationale for high attendance levels at two-year colleges. The median income for Native American families in 1980 was $13,680 compared to $ 19,920 for the total population (U.S. Printing Office, 1988). There are 23% of all Indian families headed by women with no husband present to assist with income or child care responsibilities. Over 50% of Indian women are working outside of their homes. Therefore, Indian women who wish to attend college find it necessary to attend part-time, with costs as low as possible, and with highly flexible class schedules.

Since the passage of the 1972 Indian Education Act which appropriated funds for Indian Community Colleges, many tribes with relatively large populations have developed two-year colleges (French, 1987, page 174). Within two years of the Act, six colleges were opened in the Dakotas. Currently there are approximately 20 such colleges in the country (Government Printing Office, 1987). One new college is the Northwest Indian College on the Lummi Reservation, the only Indian college in Washington.

EDUCATION AND THE ROLES OF INDIAN WOMEN

The stereotyping of Native people in the mode of chiefs, warriors, squaws, and princesses of the Plains cultures has little basis in reality (Albers and Medicine, 1983). Particularly, the roles of Native women have been seriously distorted and misrepresented by the predominantly male and Euro-American missionaries, traders, and ethnographers who contacted Native communities when colonization was taking place (Albers and Medicine, 1983). They apparently could not reconcile their own values and beliefs about the roles of women in society and family life with the roles they observed women fulfilling in Native communities. When Moor's Charity School was founded in 1755 in New England,

Indian women were allowed to attend. They were placed in homes of neighboring families and trained to work as domestics (French, 1987). The same school provided academic training for the male students. (Domestic training was regarded as education appropriate for tribal women.)

A major emphasis of all education for Indian people was separation for their families, resocialization, and Christianization (Josephy, Jr., 1971, page 86). Children were removed from their families and sent to schools that were operated according to military models. It was believed that strict, often cruel discipline, would force the changes that school leaders and teachers chose as appropriate for the students. Even contemporary Indian persons can recall experiences of punishment by school teachers when they were heard speaking their Native language (Interview with Sam Billison, Navajo, 1976).

The fact that non-Native directed and designed educational programs for Native tribes were set in place as part of the colonization effort is no coincidence (Mead, 1969). Education is an essential part of colonization efforts historically. The land and resources of the Native people were greatly desired by the non-Natives. Warfare was very costly in many respects and required trained armies. However, many persons were identified as educators and often missionary groups were willing to take on the work at little or no cost to the fledgling government. With formal schooling serving as a vehicle for bringing Tribes into land agreements and subservient relationships with the dominant colonizers, it is not difficult to see how schooling became a dreaded enemy of the Native people (Hayes, 1973).

In 1822, a report to Congress on the Indian condition, often called the Indian problem, urged that the degraded state of Indian women be raised to its proper rank and influence. Since women were the dominant influencers of family and community life, their

improved status was regarded as essential to improving the general conditions within Native communities (Albers and Medicine, 1983). The only teachers were Euro-Americans with interpretations of women's life and work that differed greatly from Native views.

When one considers the scope of work Native women did on a regular basis, it isn't difficult to realize why they had no time for schooling. Growing and gathering foods, preserving food, building homes, making clothing, tending children and elders, creating adornments, making utensils, tanning hides, cooking and serving meals, and participating in community ceremonies, all required full time and energy commitments.

Women created their social status through their work. Achievements were readily evident and immediately needed and used. They were doing work in a manner they were taught by honored elders who were obeyed and respected. Why value the teachings of people who brought with them suffering and dreaded losses especially for the Native women? Many of the men of their families were killed in combat, they lost infants and children to diseases of the whites, land use and access to waterways were severely restricted or eliminated. How could the Native women accept schooling under the direction of people who either represented or were their most feared enemies?

They could not. It has not been until the last 20 years that Native women have been able to enter schools with any level of confidence that improved working and living opportunities would result. With reforms of agencies such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Public Health Services, Indian people have gained new positions of responsibility in their own agencies and local programs. They have been given significant policy-making roles.

A statement of the Indian Policy Commission in 1961 recommended that Indian

people be allowed to take responsibility to solve their own problems, conduct their own affairs, and utilize their own resources (Josephy, Jr., 1971, page 47). In short, they have survived the onslaught of colonization and restrictive federal policies. The reward is to be treated as the independent people they were for centuries before colonization took place.

Written statements and human practices often conflict. However, the strength of women like Lorraine Misiaszek has allowed Native communities to grow and develop their own leadership and ideals. They have realized with the changes in the federal policies that allowing whites to dominate the tribal councils and administrative offices is the perpetuation of continued helplessness. It is time for the tribal communities to shape their own futures. Women now, as they always have, are actively involved in this crucial work.

In the 1980's there are Indian women making important decisions for their people. The Lummi Tribe has not only developed their own college, they also have an elementary and junior high school that enrolls over 130 students. This program is supported largely by the work of the community's women. The school's superintendent is an Indian woman. A certified teacher and most of the paraprofessionals are Indian women. At the Lummi college, the dean of students is a Lummi woman, several administrators of programs are also women. These leaders have sacrificed, managed their lives, and achieved what others thought were impossible goals. At the same time they are living role models for the hundreds of Native persons they contact through their roles.

SUMMARY

The matriarchal social systems of many Indian Tribes have granted women positions of responsibility and authority in their families. These social systems were greatly disrupted

by the radical changes resulting from colonization and the occupation of the North American continent by European and other settlers.

Native women are recognizing the necessity of empowering themselves and their children through formal educational achievements. With colleges and universities coming closer to the homes of many Native people, it is possible for them to continue living with their families and attending classes that eventually lead to college degrees.

Teachers, administrators, and counselors need to be aware of the particular needs of their students. They need to foster relationships of open acceptance and support of the students who are usually highly stressed and needing to feel understood and accepted. With cooperative networking between two-year and four-year institutions, with consistent and accessible support systems that include student and faculty mentoring, more Native women will experience the advantages and opportunities which higher education affords.

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